

Committee on Resources

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Statement of THE HONORABLE TOM LANTOS

National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands Subcommittee
Committee on Resources

U. S. House of Representatives
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Thank you Mr. Chairman and Mrs. Christensen and members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to be here today to support my legislation the Rancho Corral de Tierra Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) Boundary Adjustment Act, H.R. 532.

This is truly an extraordinary piece of legislation intended to protect and preserve an extraordinary landscape. I am thrilled to be here today because I believe we have before us a wonderful opportunity to make a valuable addition to the National Park System at a fraction of the cost to the Federal government.

Mr. Chairman, the GGNRA is a true national treasure. It provides open space and recreation in the midst of a densely populated urban area, and it is one of our nation's most heavily used national parks. H.R. 532 would adjust the boundary of the GGNRA to permit the inclusion of lands directly adjacent to existing parkland as well as nearby lands along the Pacific Ocean. The upper parcels of land offer spectacular vistas, sweeping coastal and bay views and stunning headland scenery. Inclusion of these lands would also protect the important habitats of several species of rare or endangered plants and animals.

This legislation was considered during the 107th Congress and was passed by both Houses. However, because of issues unrelated to the GGNRA the bill was not cleared for final action. In this Congress, Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer sponsored companion legislation that passed in the Senate by unanimous consent on April 3, 2003. I am very proud that in the House of Representatives this legislation is cosponsored by my very distinguished Bay Area colleagues, Ms. PELOSI, Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California, Ms. ESHOO, Ms. LEE, Mrs. TAUSCHER, Mr. HONDA, Mr. THOMPSON of California, Mr. STARK, Ms. LOFGREN, and Ms. WOOLSEY.

The new additions to the GGNRA will be accessible to more than 6 million people who live within a one hour's drive of the park and will provide national park programs and experiences to millions of national and international visitors. The dramatic ascent of Montara Mountain from the sea, 2000 feet in just over 1 mile, is a spectacular sight not duplicated anywhere else in the Park and in few other places on the California coast.

We can accomplish permanent protection of these lands through a tripartite partnership involving Federal, state and private contributions. I urge the Subcommittee to seize this unique, exciting and significant opportunity for a public-private-partnership to preserve open space. Without this much-needed protection, I have no doubt that this pristine wilderness will soon be lost to housing projects on land that is not suited for housing. And in the not too distant future we will not only lose this great natural resource but undoubtedly the Federal government will be called upon to pay for the much greater public costs of flood, fire, and landslides resulting from development of this fragile ecosystem.

Three Important New Additions to GGNRA

The Rancho Corral de Tierra Golden Gate National Recreation Area Boundary Adjustment Act of 2003 contains three important additions to the GGNRA. The largest parcel, the Rancho Corral de Tierra addition is one of the largest undeveloped parcels on the San Mateo coast. It is comprised of the four main peaks of Montara Mountain rising 2,000 feet from sea level. This 4,262-acre property includes a panorama of amazing views, important watersheds, miles of public trails, and an incredible array of wildlife and plant life. The Rancho Corral de Tierra shares three miles of boundary with the GGNRA. Its relatively untouched upper elevations preserve rare habitat for several threatened and endangered plant and animal species. The property also contains four important coastal watersheds, which provide riparian corridors for steel head

trout, coho salmon and other aquatic species.

H.R. 532 also authorizes the National Park Service to include within the GGNRA the Martini Creek-Devil's Slide Bypass right-of-way, which was purchased by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to build a highway across Montara Mountain. When San Mateo voters overwhelmingly decided in a local referendum in favor of building the Devil's Slide tunnel rather than the Martini Creek Bypass, this right-of-way became obsolete. This property covers approximately 300 acres and divides the Rancho Corral de Tierra property and connects the proposed additions to the GGNRA to existing state parkland, creating a seamless belt of parkland. Once the GGNRA boundary is adjusted through this legislation to include this right-of-way, Caltrans will be able and intends to donate the property to the NPS.

H.R.532 also authorizes the NPS to include within the GGNRA boundaries approximately 500 acres of land along the Devil's Slide section of Coastal Highway 1, the scenic highway that winds its way along the entire California coast. These properties will make a logical addition to the park by filling in gaps to adjacent and existing State and Federal parkland. Caltrans either already owns or will acquire these lands when it builds the Devil's Slide tunnel and will then donate these properties for open space use after the tunnel is built. It is not the intention of this legislation, Mr. Chairman, to interfere with Caltrans' responsibility for building the tunnel at Devil's Slide. This legislation will simply make it possible for Caltrans or any other state or local agency to donate these properties to the National Park Service when the Devil's Slide tunnel is completed and when the National Park Service has determined that the acquisition of these lands is appropriate.

Private-Public Partnership

Mr. Chairman, the Rancho Corral de Tierra Golden Gate National Recreation Area Boundary Adjustment Act provides the federal government a unique opportunity to place approximately 5,000 new acres of pristine land under permanent protection. The Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) purchased the Rancho Corral de Tierra site for \$29.75 million to save the site from development and to preserve this important natural area. POST is a local land conservancy trust in the San Francisco Bay Area and has a remarkable track record in working with and assisting the federal government with the protection of other important open space in the Bay Area. POST has offered to donate a significant amount towards the federal acquisition of the Rancho Corral de Tierra property through private contributions. I am pleased that POST President Audrey Rust could be here today to testify on behalf of this bill.

Under this legislation, the Rancho Corral de Tierra will be preserved through a tripartite partnership between the National Park Service, California State Parks and the Peninsula Open Space Trust. For the Rancho Corral de Tierra property, we will seek 50% of the acquisition from the federal government and 50% through state and private contributions. The other properties will be donated by Caltrans.

Strong Local Support

H.R.532 enjoys strong local support. The Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Point Reyes National Seashore Citizens Advisory Commission adopted a resolution endorsing this legislation and supporting the addition of these areas into the GGNRA after holding a public hearing and receiving public comment from local residents. The San Mateo County Board of Supervisors also passed a resolution supporting enactment of this legislation. The legislation also has the strong support of local environmental advocacy and preservation groups. The proposed additions were studied by POST in accordance with National Park Service criteria and in consultation with National Park Service staff. The study found that the three tracts of land meet the criteria for additions to units of the National Park Service. The study found that the properties will preserve significant natural, scenic and recreational resources that are equal to or are unparalleled in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Reauthorizes Citizens Advisory Commission

H.R.532 will also reauthorize the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Point Reyes National Seashore Citizens Advisory Commission for an additional 10 years. The Advisory Commission has been an invaluable resource for park management since its inception in 1972. It provides an important forum for the gathering and receipt of public input, public opinion and public comment and allows the park to maintain constructive and informal contacts with both the private sector and other federal, state and local public agencies. The Advisory Commission aids in strengthening the spirit of cooperation between the National Park Service and the public, encourages private cooperation with other public agencies, and assists in developing and ensuring that the park's general management plan is implemented.

Concerns Raised

Mr. Chairman, while this bill was passed in both Houses during the last Congress and has already been passed by the Senate in this Congress, two questions have come to my attention as we approached this hearing. The first is the question of agricultural leases within the park boundary. Approximately 300 acres of land within the proposed boundary expansion are currently leased for agricultural uses. Some concern has been raised about whether those leases will continue. I am pleased that NPS Director Mainella has responded directly to Senator Feinstein's inquiry on this question and indicates that current law allows landowners to reserve agricultural rights for 25 years or life and also allows the NPS to extend agricultural leases beyond the 25-year period.

The other question regarding park additions is their impact on the backlog of deferred maintenance by the National Park Service. I agree that the backlog of deferred maintenance is an important priority and should be addressed. However, I also believe that this priority should not exclude all other priorities particularly when we have an opportunity to make a valuable addition at a bargain rate. I urge the Subcommittee to join with the local and state partners to acquire this valuable property while we have the opportunity. To be sure an opportunity like this will not last long.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, preserving our country's unique natural areas is one of our highest national priorities, and it is one of my highest priorities as a Member of Congress. We must preserve and protect these unique and rare areas for our children and grandchildren today or they will be lost forever. Adding these new lands to the GGNRA will provide greater recreational opportunities for the public to enjoy and will allow us to protect these fragile natural areas from encroaching development or other inappropriate uses which would destroy the scenic beauty and natural character of this key part of the California coast. The California coast is a true national treasure and with your help we can preserve it for the generations that follow us. I strongly urge your support of H.R.532, the Rancho Corral de Tierra Golden Gate National Recreation Area Boundary Adjustment Act of 2003.

Thank you.